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Disabilities Issues Committee

May 31, 2012

Mercer County Special Services School District
Elementary School, 2nd floor

Present: Amy Schuler (TCNJ), Scott Elliott (Progressive Center for Independent Living), Kimberly Schneider (MCTS), Alice Curry-Sheret (MCTS), Tom Shaw (MC Office for the Disabled), Mel Crawford (DVRS), John Raines (MC One Stop), Maryanne Moller (MCSSSD), Beverly Mills (Mercer County Workforce Investment Board)

Opening and Introductions:

The meeting was opened by Dr. Kimberly Schneider, Interim Chair for the WIB Disabilities Issues Committee.

Minutes from March 29, 2012 were reviewed and approved without correction. The minutes will be posted on the Mercer County website at www.mercercounty.org (under Board and Commissions).

Countywide Reference Manual:

Kim began the meeting by reiterating that this committee does not intend to reinvent the wheel in terms of creating awareness. As a committee we will need to brainstorm what needs to be accomplished and devise a mini-strategic plan. Since the suggestion was made at the previous meeting that the committee look into developing a countywide reference manual, Dr. Schneider asked committee members to introduce themselves and briefly speak on the agency they represent and scope of their responsibility.

Tom Shaw began with a synopsis of his role at the Mercer County Office for the Disabled. He spoke about the two staffs he manages, the programs funded under his office and the types of partnerships with local agencies. Tom reiterated the importance of one central location for a reference directory. Offices such as Aging and Disabilities and the Mercer County Board of Social Services will all have the same information entered into a system at one time pertaining to an individual through the Aging & Disabilities Resource Connection (ADRC). Tom suggested we should all be linked together through our respective websites.

Bev Mills volunteered to collect lists of appropriate links – Tom volunteered to speak with County IT personnel so we can have links on the County site. Bev further noted the WIB should add a dedicated page for the Disabilities Committee (with added links) similar to what was developed for the WIB Literacy Committee.

Future Goals:

Dr. Schneider spoke about the value of the input from Judy Formalarie (State Employment Training Commission) regarding the vision of the committee. Should the committee create a time line of events or goals we want to pursue in order to stay on track? What is our vision, where are the gaps?

Tom informed the committee about legislation being proposed by Senator Sweeney named “Adult Center for Transition.” He pointed out how this legislation would create numerous problems for Mercer County in terms of funding and how transition services are performed. This proposed legislation should not be regarded as a “one size fits all” as it would require County Colleges to centralize transition services for adults through age 24. Mercer County, unlike other counties, has had systems in place for quite some time. Scott added Mercer County has a full compendium of services to offer students and this would be at risk with the new legislation. Students would no longer have this freedom.

Amy also expressed concern and stated this legislation would go against federal government initiatives; the federal government espouses choices. This legislation would silo people with disabilities.

Tom informed the Human Services Directors were scheduled to meet and most likely would be discussing this topic along with the restructuring of DDD and DCF. He will keep us informed and email his submission regarding this legislation.

Kim suggested someone from these agencies be invited to the next Disabilities meeting to bring information.

Mel agreed that Senator Sweeney’s proposed legislation is mind boggling however the committee should narrow our scope and concentrate on issues of employment and training. As a WIB committee we need to promote employment opportunities, continue to communicate with other groups, establish relationships and explore innovative ways to create jobs. We should recognize “employer friendly” employers.

Kim mentioned that October is “Disabilities Month” and perhaps recognize an employer through the Chamber of Commerce. Scott agreed October is a good month for disability awareness and can act as a liaison with the Chamber. He added we must keep an eye on barriers employers may have to hiring people with disabilities, such as transportation.

Nancy mentioned students with transportation issues (denial of Access Link). Amy concurred; in terms of training and employment transportation is a huge issue and someone should advocate to Access Link.

Tom mentioned Steve Cook from Arc should be invited to discuss with this committee but only if he’s to be part of the solution.

In terms of October and Disability Awareness, Kim suggested honoring a student for achievement along with an employer – contacts can be made through the audience. We should get a list of employers who hire the people with disabilities and have a track record. Veterans are, of course, included in this list.

Tom suggested calling Ed Mazzeo (County Veterans’ Services); we need a Veteran on this committee. Bev Mills will connect with Ed.

Kim closed the meeting asking if there were any other issues to discuss to be emailed.

Next meeting: Thursday, July 19, 2012 10:00 – 11:30 at the Mercer County Special Services Elementary School (2nd floor conference room). For directions please go to: www.mcsssd.org

